(c) and (d) In the context of India's future energy needs, both sides discussed the possibility of cooperation in civilian nuclear energy. Technical issues in this regard are being examined by concerned officials on both sides.

Revision of Rules relating to Haj Pilgrimage

2265. DR. AKHILESH DAS: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have lately decided to revise the rules and guidelines relating to facilities granted for Haj Pilgrimage;

(b) if so, the main aspects thereof to be revised; and

(c) the main charges and modifications to be introduced as a result thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) to (c) The Government recently reviewed the facilities granted for Haj Pilgrimage with regard to subsidy in air fare and have removed discriminatory conditions with regard to the number of pilgrimages in one's life time, status of the pilgrim as an income-tax payee and use of accomodation provided by the Haj Committee. Non income-tax payees will get higher priority for availing of subsidy in air fare.

Pendency of passport applications

2266. SHRI LEKHRAJ BACHANI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of applications for grant of new passport or applications for renewal of passports pending in various passport offices in the country;

(b) whether the regional passport offices have been increased from 21 to 30 whereas staff strength has not been increased inspite of increase in the number of passports;

(c) whether all India passport employees association has made representation to the Government; and

(d) if so, what are their demands?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) As on 31st October, 2004, approximately 1,80,000 applications are pending in various Passport Offices in the country.

(b) At present, there are 30 Passport Offices in the country. The number of passport applications has increased over a period of time. The staff strength has also gone up although it is not concomitant with the increase in the number of passport applications received.

(c) Yes.

(d) the issues relate to service matters.

Trans Asian Railways

2267. SHRI B.J. PANDA: Will the Minister of EXTERNALAFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Myanmar-India link a component of Trans Asian Railways (TAR) network, would be ready by 2005;

(b) the details of the rail routes of the TAR and time-frame within which the entire project would be completed; and

(c) the details of agreement on sharing of the cost of the project between different countries to be served by the rail route?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) The feasibility study being conducted on the India-Myanmar rail link by RITES Ltd. is expected to be completed by January, 2005. Subsequent work will be undertaken after consideration of the report prepared by RITES Ltd.

(b) Three routes have been identified for examination under the Trans Asian Railways (TAR) network. The proposed Northern Corridor would link the Russian Federation, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, China and the Korean Peninsula. The proposed Southern Corridor would link Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanks and Bangladesh. A third proposed Corridor would link China, Lao PDR, Thailand, Malaysia, Myanmar.